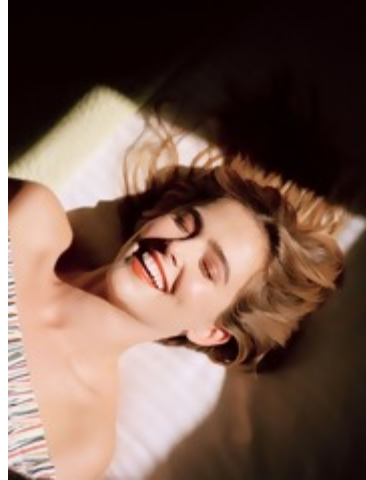




Along the Wire by WhatsGoingOn

Category: Stranger Things, 2016

Genre: Angst, Romance

Language: English

Characters: OC, Steve H.

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2018-01-23 22:02:42

Updated: 2018-01-23 22:02:42

Packaged: 2019-12-17 00:26:21

Rating: M

Chapters: 1

Words: 4,557

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Valerie; meaning "of strength." Yet here she was, on the brink of breaking.

Along the Wire

Disclaimer: I do not in any shape or form own any one of the Duffer Brothers' creations, such as the marvelous Steve Harrington. This story takes place directly after the major events of S2, minus the Snow Ball, that has yet to start here!

Hawkins, Indiana

November 11, 1974

"This looks like crap."

The sound of silverware clattering against wood punctuated the still morning air. The distinct choking of hot coffee further permeated the once still atmosphere.

"Excuse me?"

"I said...it looks...gross." Tommy Dunne grumbled as he slumped against his chair, his fingers played with a loose thread from his worn red hoodie. His twin sister, Becca, who stared at her brother with mouth agape when he first made his declaration, resumed playing with her own spoonful of "crap."

Valerie Dunne fixed her brother with a hard stare before she continued drinking her mug of liquid life. The taste of the dark bitter beverage happily danced on the back of her tongue, hazel eyes closed in sheer pleasure. Her peaceful meditation was abruptly interrupted by the sound of Tommy shifting in his chair followed by a loud forceful sigh.

Here we go. Valerie's ivory brow began to tighten and pinch at the center. *It was too early in the morning to deal with this shit.* "You don't like the cereal, Tommy?" The question came out extremely flat and dull, but Val just didn't have the energy to care quite yet. A couple more mouthfuls of coffee, though, and she'd be there. Her brother's brown gaze fixed on her own as he bobbed in his chair.

"Where's the Lucky Charms?" Ah, she had been expecting this. The

second she reached for the Kashi instead of the familiar red box with the smiling leprechaun at the grocery store, she knew she was going to get an earful. It was just too damn early to talk about it right this second.

"This stuff is better for you." To emphasize her point, the eldest Dunne sibling grabbed the spoon from his bowl and placed a generous portion of the cereal in her mouth. Val was only mid chew before she crinkled her nose in distaste, brother and sister both watched her carefully. One with a look of mild curiosity and the other with a look of triumph. She nearly dry heaved as she swallowed the lump of what could be better defined as dry bark, eyes tight in discomfort. Arms across his chest, Tommy appeared pleasantly smug, smile almost as wide as it was on Christmas morning.

"It's crap," he simply stated and pushed the bowl as far from him as possible. Val merely rolled her eyes.

"Language." Sure it wasn't as bad as half of the words she had said accidentally in front of the two, or even her dad's colorful vocabulary when he was home, but Val didn't want that terrible habit to spread to the twins. They were only nine for Christ-sakes!

"Do we have to eat the crap?" Becca's small voice broke into the conversation, the question a quiet plea. She silently pled to Val with puppy dog eyes; she knew that was the teen's weak spot. Resigned, at both their language and the fact that the cereal was indeed confirmed crap, Val lifted her arms and slapped them down, skipping over to the freezer and broke out the last two Eggos their dad had hidden behind the peas. She heard resounding applause and cheers from the kitchen, a small smile tracing her face as she plopped the waffles in the toaster. Dad was so good at hiding junk food.

"I only got that stuff because Dr. Roberts said Dad needs to eat healthier." That response caused the two younger children to pause in their merriment, tremors of worry working down their spines. Val noticed her mistake almost immediately, eyes widening in panic at her own words.

"Oh shi - cra - sorry!" Valerie's voice squeaked as she stumbled over her words, skin reddening in both frustration and embarrassment.

"Dad's cholesterol is just higher than it has been in the past. Nothing bad, I swear," she said firmly.

Two small sighs of relief were heard, and unconsciously, Valerie released one of her own as she polished off the remainder of her coffee. The three Dunnes continued their morning breakfast routine in silence; Tommy and Becca happily ate their waffles (one with peanut butter, one with syrup) and Valerie packed three brown bags with three identical lunches. Val carefully packed them each in brown paper sacs, and autographed them with their corresponding owners. Before she forgot, the teen dropped a Hershey's kiss into the bags labeled '*Tomster*' and '*Becks*.' Just like their mom used to.

Tommy was about halfway through explaining how he saw David Isaac lick a trash can, which sounded horrifying by the way, when Valerie crept quietly out of the kitchen and up the stairs to check on their mother in their parents' room. As she opened the door a crack, the hinges creaked violently causing the teen to cringe and slither her way through the small opening.

"Mom?" The hushed question was met with silence, and a mix of bile and dread crept up Val's throat.

Please don't let today be the day.

"Mom." This time it wasn't a question, and Valerie increased the volume of her voice in the hope that she was just sleeping. Her bare toe tips pressed firmly into the maroon shag carpet as she inched closer to her mother's still form. Val's willowy hands braced themselves on the floral down comforter, her polished fingertips drifting towards her mother's throat. Mary Dunne, whom had been curled on her side blissfully silent, let out the softest of hums. Her daughter paused in her movements and shook, both startled and pleased.

Not today.

"Mom, I made some raisin toast earlier," she continued in a whisper, "it's probably not warm anymore, but I know how much you like it." Two almond eyes slowly peered open, glazed with sleepiness, and her lips slowly stretched into a smile. Another hum, this time in

confirmation.

"Marissa is letting me out a little early tonight, so the twins will be with me." Val was seated now, one hand in her lap, the other rested gingerly on her mother's shoulder. "I think there's a decent amount of tuna casserole leftover, so if you can, warm it up whenever you want. Don't wait for us." The pattering of rushed footsteps ascending the stairs caused a slight tremble in the room. The moderate sized ball of brown and tan fluff that was the family cat Glenn unfurled with a noisy chirrup, paws stretching onto her mistress's blanketed stomach, her slumber interrupted as the twins burst into the room.

"Guys, Mom is still waking up," Val remarked in a sing-song voice. Her tawny eyebrows raised to the top of her forehead as she nodded her head vigorously in the direction of their mother. Instead of being alarmed, Becca sweetly smiled, finger over her mouth, while Tommy let out a loud giggle before the two enveloped their mother in a hug. Valerie chuckled, slowly got up from her seat on the bed, gently lifted Glenn up and hugged her against her chest. The cat happily purred for a few minutes as Tommy recounted the David Issac story to their fully awake mother, who displayed animated looks causing Becca to burst into a fit of giggles. Val absentmindedly glanced down at the watch on her wrist. 7:00. They needed to hustle.

"Shit."

"Language." Val stuck her tongue out at Tommy who pointed at her in accusation. Seeming to understand why her eldest swore (not letting her off the hook about it of course), Mary glanced at her own bedside clock, and noted the time.

"Have a good day at school you two," Mary murmured against her son's head as she placed a kiss to it, before he turned her head, placed a kiss on her youngest daughter's head, and squeezed them tight. After saying their own goodbye, the twins clamored out of the room, Becca grabbing a hold of the cat out of her sister's hands on the way out. Val made out the distinct sounds of sneakers squeaking against floor tiles and the heft of book bags onto tiny shoulders.

Tawny hair curtained down over the front of her face as she bent down and placed a kiss to her mother's forehead, the elder woman's

shaky hands brushed the strands behind her ears. "That goes for you too, you know." The motherly tone nearly had Valerie rolling her eyes, but instead she just nodded.

"I know." Her mom clasped her hands in her own, giving them a tight squeeze before she began to retreat out of the room. "And stop calling to check up on me!" The light tone in her mother's voice, caused Val to spin around, send a mock salute, and back out the door, leaving it a crack open.

Yeah, like she wasn't gonna check up on her.

A splutter, a kick, a roar, and a loud hum. Heat eked out into the Ford Carousel, Valerie rubbed her hands together to warm her palms before she touched the cold leather of the steering wheel. The twins, however, were content in their seats, Tommy hummed the 'G.I. Joe' theme to himself, while Becca started a picture of sorts (she appeared to be in deep concentration). Pink and green beanied heads bopped in a pleasant serenity. *Am I the only one that can't tolerate any temperature extremes in this family?* Already regretting leaving her beloved gloves behind, Val threw the van in reverse and backed out into the street.

"Why can't we walk to school?" Tommy liked to ask this question at least once a month, even though he knew the answer, and it had yet to change. Val glanced at him from the rear view mirror and pointedly rolled her eyes at him. "Me and Becca get to school so early and it's so stupid!" The teen was shocked he didn't send her seat a swift kick.

"You know the rules Dad laid out last year. They don't change, bud," she retorted. Tommy sent the teen a glare and she could already tell what he wanted to say. *Zombie boy ruined everything.* She held up one hand in response, the other effectively commanded the wheel. Tommy had the poor habit of 'following the crowd' in regards to socializing. Becca remained mum on the matter, probably because she had gone over Erica Sinclair's house several times and had met Will Byers. Valerie remembered her tiny sister quietly shrugged her shoulders and remarked that he was nice.

"No walking anywhere unless there's supervision. No ifs ands or buts." In a way she could understand her brother's frustration. The grade school was only a 10 minute walk from their house, and a lot of the twins' friends made that walk, even after the whole Will Byers disappearance/reappearance fiasco. Instead, they got to school 20 minutes early and had to wait around the lunch room for their friends to arrive ten minutes before classes started. It sucked, but their parents were adamant about Val driving them to and from school, and she wasn't one to argue.

While her brother remained sulking in silence, the eldest in the car turned the radio on, tuning it until the sounds of *'Dreams'* mingled with the now warm air of the vehicle. The teen held her one hand in a fist and began to sing into it like a microphone.

Who wants to wrap around your dreams and,

Have you any dreams you'd like to sell?

Dreams of loneliness,

Like a heartbeat drives you mad

In the stillness of remembering, what you had,

And what you lost and what you had and what you lost.

Valerie had pulled the van up to the entrance of the school just before Stevie started the chorus, giving her ample time to put the car in park and peer back at her siblings. Both had their tiny hands covering their ears and their faces were scrunched up in distaste.

"Your ears just haven't developed enough to hear how beautiful my singing truly is!" She stuck her pink tongue out after her stately proclamation; a giggle and a groan were the only responses she was given.

"Meet back here at 2:50?" She chimed the question, fingers drumming along to the beat of the music. The claddagh ring in her right ring finger created an almost musical thwack when it struck the pleather wheel. Becca slowly made her exit; carefully unbuckled herself from her chair and slung her electric pink backpack across her shoulders.

Tommy hesitated, pausing as he leaned forward. "Can I go over Bobby Newman's house after school?" Valerie paused in her movements, taking in the hopeful and expectant look her brother was giving her. The brown eyes that stared back at her were wide and pleading. Clearly someone had taken notes on his twin's puppy dog eyes earlier.

She inhaled deeply, index finger tapped her rosy lips in thought. Bobby Newman lived about three blocks from the school, and without a doubt would be walking home as opposed to taking a bus. This was an automatic violation of the rule that which had been explained for about the fifteenth time this year. If she was lax this one time, there would be other times he was going to ask and use this as an excuse. Not to mention this wasn't fair to Becca either, who had asked only once to walk to a friend's house and had not asked since. She let out the breath she was holding. *Time to be the bad guy.*

"Tommy, you're putting me in a really awkward position." He remained frozen, still waiting. "Tommy, n- " before she could finish the rejection, Tommy cut her off.

"Bobby talked to his mom, she said she'd walk to the school to pick us up," he exclaimed, breathless but still frozen in his seat. Val was unsure, she began to bounce her leg up and down in nerves.

"Don't start lying to me."

"I'm not, I swear!" Tommy's voice had raised exponentially at this point, desperation oozed from his voice, he was practically shaking. Becca observed with mild interest, standing just outside the van, as she patiently waited to slam the door of the Ford closed. Valerie tilted her head back, hazel eyes took in the beat up interior roof before she looked back at her brother.

"You swear?" His small brown head nodded vigorously. "So if I get here 10 minutes early, I'll see Mrs. Newman?" The bated breathing stopped, eyes tripled in size with panic. He hadn't considered that question. *Busted.*

"No Tommy." She said this firmly, her tone softened in disappointment from both his willingness to lie, how convincing he

was, and (and mostly this) the fact that she couldn't say yes.

"I could drop you guys off, no problem." Val saw Tommy's shoulders slump slightly and his head dip low. She ducked her head to get a better look at him in the eyes; they were downcast. She felt part of her heart plummet into her stomach. She felt like such a good time buzzkill.

"C'mon, bud, it'll be fun! You guys will get there so much quicker, that means more time to play," she added sending him a wide smile, hoping somehow this would make things better.

He let out one of the saddest sighs she had ever heard. "Robbie, John, Cam, and Pete are going over his house too. There's not room in here for everyone," Tommy murmured. He started to slowly unbuckle himself from the seat and grab his backpack. Valerie felt a swell of desperation build up in her, and she nearly leapt out of her seat to stop him from exiting.

"I can drop you off!" This time she was the one that looked hopeful. She wanted the gnawing feeling of guilt out of her, it was practically suffocating. Tommy just shook his head. "It's okay, Sissy."

He ducked under her outstretched arm, and slid the door open. "We'll see you at 2:50," he said before slamming the door as he turned towards the school and trodded off slowly.

Val threw herself into her seat, sending her sister a small smile from outside the car. Becca merely offered her a simple shrug of the shoulders as she closed the car door and gave her wave. "See you later, Sissy," she called out as she rushed after her brother.

In frustration, the teen slammed her head to the steering wheel, a long winded honk sounded from the vehicle that drew stares from teachers entering the nearby building. The soft melody of *'Nobody Knows'* started to play which snapped her from thoughts of self deprecation.

"See you later."

"Becky Stevenson is such a ho." Val could see her best friends Elizabeth, Isabella, and Tracey as she approached with quickened steps. The three girls were congregated around her and Liz's lockers, no doubt waiting for her before they were off to home room. Val's white sneakers let out an obnoxious squeak as she began to jog towards the girls, causing all three to look her. Liz beamed.

"Val pal, we were getting worried," Liz waggled a tapered finger at her, "being tardy is very unlike you." Valerie wrinkled her nose at her closest friend, causing the other to shake in laughter. Tracey stepped to the side as the tardy teen said her hellos and went into her locker to empty-then-refill her knapsack with books.

She loudly cleared her throat as she performed her daily ritual. "So why is Becky Stevenson a ho?" Val didn't like to admit it to anyone but her guilty pleasure was gossip. Any normal teenage girl indulged in it, it was just the norm, and this was part of the reason she liked it so much. It made her feel like a normal teenager with not-a-care in the world. Not one that had to sacrifice so much and was going to lose a parent to cancer.

Liz gave her a sly side eye and smirk, one the brunette readily returned. Tracey gave a slight huff in annoyance (not a fan and of gossip, that one), while Isabella licked her lips and took in a large gulp of air. *Oh, this was going to be good.*

"Well, April Klein told me that Karen Harper told her that Carol Campbell said she saw Becky making out with Billy Hargrove on Saturday at Vicky Norris's party. And Becky knows for a fact that I have a crush on Billy! I told her last Tuesday during gym." The raven haired girl paused to catch her breath, olive skin turned an unflattering shade of red in both breathlessness and anger.

From behind Isabella, Tracey rolled her caramel eyes and mouthed 'drama' causing Liz to snicker and Val to snort. Isabella hardly noticed and continued on with her tirade. "I feel personally victimized, you know? I felt like me and Billy were really bonding. Like when I got my haircut last week, he told me he thought it looked short and sexy. And God knows Becky just craves male attention, remember when I had a crush on Steve Harrington sophomore year? Then she goes and dates him for four months?! She's plotting against

me I tell you," she finished with bated breath, hand on her chest as the other reached into her jeans pocket for chapstick. Val bit her bottom lip to keep from laughing, because while she loved Isabella, the girl was a bit dramatic and crazed when it came to boys.

"Legitimate conspiracy, Izzy," Liz deadpanned. This time the laughter squeaked out of Valerie. "Didn't she send you her part of your guys' calc homework late so you couldn't go to the party?" Liz slowly tapped the tip of her nose, which caused Val to shake in silent laughter and Tracey to shake her head in disapproval. She was feeding the beast at this point. Isabella nodded her head vigorously, brown orbs widened in understanding, and snapped her fingers.

"Exactly! The girl is sabotaging my love life!" Izzy practically screeched this, causing a couple of people passing by to turn their heads. Val heard Tracey quietly tell her friend to lower her voice. "Well, she isn't gonna win this one." Liz lifted a fist in the air in mock solidarity, an action that went completely over the other girl's head as she raised one of her own. Valerie was openly laughing as she closed her locker, Izzy cocked her head to the side. Tracey glared daggers at the three girls. She was always the pacifist among the four, always willing to give people the benefit of the doubt.

The warning bell whirled loudly into the hallway, signaling students they had five minutes to get to home room. Tracey was the first to peel away, having the farthest walk, her deep chocolate waves sashayed as she departed from her friends. The other three girls slowly walked to their respective home rooms together; Isabella's was next-door to Liz and Val's. They were having a normal conversation about '*Facts of Life*,' when what only could be a lightbulb went off in Isabella's head.

"Val, don't you have math with Billy?" Panic began to seep into every pore of Val as a Cheshire grin was plastered on the other girl's face. This was karma for her laughing earlier, no doubt.

"Uh, yeah but - " Liz cut her off. "Yes she does, and, Val, don't you sit right in front of him?" Liz's inquiry held a happy hum, as she of course knew the answer to that question. Damn Mr. Schiller and his alphabetical seating assignments. Izzy's hopeful look started to make Val's stomach churn in unease.

"So you could talk to Billy for me maybe? Oh, you should tell him that Becky has webbed feet or..." Izzy excitedly went on with her thoughts and payed no mind to the other two girls with her.

Valerie twirled her wavy hair nervously around her finger and shifted one sneakered foot to another. She really didn't want to get in the middle of some over dramatic feud between two people, even if one of them was one of her best friends, and even if the feud was one sided in nature. Furthermore, she definitely *did not* want to talk to Billy Hargrove. It's not like she even talked to him to begin with, as he was definition of ignorant and pompous, so why start now? Besides, the last time she talked to a boy for Isabella was in the 7th grade and it was one of the most awkward and horrid experiences she had to go through. Ray Price still couldn't look her straight in the eyes without nervous laughter coming out.

"I don't -" but before she could finish Izzy clasped her hands together and chanted "please" several times before she sank to her knees. She could feel about ten eyes on her, two of them no doubt shone in amusement.

Val practically stomped her feet. "Fine!" Her voice cracked in frustration, Izzy squeaked in delight, and Liz cackled in pleasure.

"You're the best, you know that?" Isabella gave the brunette a bone crushing hug, one that was not reciprocated, before skipping off to her home room. There was a glow to her apple cheeks and a twinkle in her voice as she hummed. Val's slim shoulders sagged just as a warm mocha arm slithered around them as their two sets of feet pivoted into the threshold of their home room.

"I hate you so much right now."

"No you don't. I know you love me the most!" The girls took their seats as Mr. Levi filed into the room just as the bell rang, toupee askew as he plopped his briefcase onto his desk. Flipping open the bag, the teacher rummaged through it for various papers. They approximately had one minute to chat before he started taking attendance and the announcements started.

"How's my Mama doing?" Val and Liz had been best friends since

kindergarten, quickly bonding over their love of 'Goodnight Moon' and finger paints, as well as a mutual disdain for nap time. The two were attached at the hip since, often going on each others' family trips together. This, of course, led to referring to each other's parents as 'mom' or 'dad.' Since Mrs. Dunne had gotten sick Liz had seemed to increase her usage of the maternal term towards her.

"Same I guess, she was really groggy this morning when I checked on her." Liz merely nodded her head as she dug her planner out of her quilted bag. "You guys hear from the Lab yet?" Brown eyes inquired to hazel ones. Both held a certain contempt in them when the Lab was brought up.

It seemed *that place* had brought to Hawkins a shroud of misery in the past year with the disappearance/re-emergence of Will Byers and the death of Barbara Holland. For the Dunne family, though, the misery had a three year span. Val hated that place and was glad it was closed for good.

"No, but we expect a final check this week or the next," Val said in a sad sigh. As she fidgeted with her ballpoint pen, Liz's hand snuck its way onto hers.

She didn't say anything, but she didn't need to because Val could read what she said by the look in her eyes and soft smile on her face. It read: fuck them, you'll make it through this, and I'm here every step of the way. Val slowly sent her smile and gave her hand a squeeze before Mr. Levi's booming voice broke through the flurried conversations in the room.

"Connelly, Mark."

Today would be long. Today would be tough. But today would be doable.

A/N: So this chapter is mostly set up for the story with a wide array of OCs, and no canon characters as of yet. The audacity! Don't worry, our favorite Farrah Fawcett spray wearing guy makes a premiere appearance in the next chapter so stick around.

Heads up, I'm a nurse with a full time job, in graduate school, and am very busy, so I'm going to update this story when I can and when inspiration strikes. I'll try my best to churn out a chapter every month or two, but I can't promise anything concrete.

Reviews and constructive criticism are very much appreciated and will garner enthusiastic responses and shout outs. Thank you all for reading, xx.